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ABSTRACT

To answer the question of who shall receive equal, quality education in America, the purpose of education as it is tied to the democratic philosophy of the United States should be examined. Most Americans give lip service to the principles of democracy in education, but resist their implementation. Yet, multiracial schools are essential if all children are to have the opportunity to survive and thrive in our society. One of the most recent obstacles to equal, quality education is the Supreme Court's reversal of the Bradley Vs. Milliken decision, which maintains that the original judge erred in ordering a metropolitan Detroit desegregation plan without evidence of segregation in the suburban districts. It is evident, nonetheless, that urban communities have become black and minority enclaves which are ringed by all white suburbs. Another barrier to school desegregation has been school boards' determination to maintain the segregated status quo. Discrimination also occurs when tests are allowed to predict academic success. Student and teacher racial attitudes are clearly related to all the above factors. Educators must work against these forces of discrimination. Teacher training programs should ensure that future teachers understand minority cultures and problems. (Author/MC)

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QUALITY EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION*

Robert L. Green**

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The reopening of school this fall in Boston was marred by angry, and frequently violent, demonstrations. Federal troops were called in to help maintain order and Northerners found that Little Rock -- the shameful symbol of educational segregation in the South -- had come home to the North.

Seventeen years ago Americans at large were appalled by the actions of white Southerners who fought so violently against school desegregation and the Supreme Court's declaration that equal educational opportunity meant education in multi-racial schools. To many, the struggle in Little Rock represented the black struggle to end unfair education in the South.

Today, the struggle for quality education is still with us. Its greatest battles, however, have moved from the South to the North, from Little Rock, through Pontiac, Michigan, to Boston. And today the same major question still remains -- who shall be properly educated in America and how?

Importance of Education

To answer this question, we must first look at the purpose of

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education as it is tied to the democratic philosophy of the United States. Few Americans would dispute that the goal of public education is to prepare our children to be useful adults, able to contribute something to society. Educator John Dewey describes the school as a place where individualism and socialism are one: "Only by being true to the full growth of all individuals who make it up, can society by chance be true to itself." (4, p.7)

Most Americans give lip service to the principles of democracy in education, but at the same time, there is widespread resistance to their implementation. Blacks have been denied access to educational opportunity ever since the move to establish public schools was begun.

In his book Black Reconstruction in America, W.E.B. DuBois cites instances throughout the South when Negro schools were closed, the teachers frightened away, and schoolhouses burned (5, pp. 637-669). While a few people called for the education of blacks, DuBois quotes others as claiming that "the sole aim [of public schools] should be to educate every white child in the commonwealth (5, p. 647)."

This desire of whites to exclude blacks from the education system must be considered when we talk about quality schools. We must formulate a definition of quality education which includes: (1) maximizing the academic achievement of every American child, and (2) developing multi-racial systems which de-emphasize racial hate and anger such as DuBois describes in post-Civil War America and such as we saw recently in Boston.

If these two goals are achieved, we will have come a long way toward creating a society where all people will have the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary for a particular occupation or career and to use those skills in a meaningful way -- a society where color and culture will not stop a person from achieving his goals.

I firmly believe, as does the NAACP, that multiracial schools are a must if all children are to be accorded the opportunity to survive and thrive in our society. Only by growing and learning together as students can children of all races learn to respect each other as children and later as adults participating in our society. Until such mutual appreciation is developed, there will be discrimination and hostility in our society.

Stumbling Blocks to Quality Education

There are still many obstacles to overcome in our drive for equal, quality education. One of the most recent is the reversal of Judge Stephen Roth's decision in Bradley v. Milliken in Detroit. Last July, the U. S. Supreme Court said that Roth erred in ordering a desegregation plan embracing both Detroit and its suburbs without any evidence as to whether the suburban districts were segregated. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, speaking for the court, said federal courts may not impose multi-district desegregation plans where there is no finding that all the school districts included had failed to operate integrated school systems (2, p. A 1).

Justice Thurgood Marshall dissented, saying:

> We deal here with the right of all of our children, whatever their race, to an equal start in life and to

> an equal opportunity to reach their full potential as citizens. Those children who have been denied that right in the past deserve better than to see fences thrown up to deny them that right in the future (2, p.A 1).

The right or wrong of the Supreme Court decision will be debated hotly for years. However, no one can question the truth of Marshall's statement that children in the past have been denied an equal start in life. In the Detroit decision, Roth cites many of the circumstances in that city which led to segregated schools. These are problems with which Detroit and other large cities will have to cope.

Segregated Housing

The question of Northern school segregation is closely tied to that of residential segregation. The 1948 Shelley v. Kraemer decision against racially restricted housing covenants did nothing to eliminate discrimination; therefore, urban communities have become black and minority enclaves ringed by all-white suburbs. This is the reason that busing became the only way in which most major cities could create multi-racial schools (6, pp. 218-219). And segregated housing still remains a hindrance to integrating school districts.

Today cities are becoming even more segregated. Between 1960 and 1970, the white central city population in metropolitan areas of 500,000 or more declined by 1.9 million while the comparable black population increased by 2.8 million (13). In a wealthy section of Westchester County, a New York suburb, the population from 1960 to 1966 increased by 20,000 whites and one black. Six major cities now have black majorities and eight others are 40 percent black or more (9, E-2).

Realtors and Housing Discrimination

The real estate industry in the U. S. has contributed greatly to segregated housing patterns. Since both buyers and sellers must depend on the advice of their real estate broker, the broker is in a key position to influence who lives next to whom. A U. S. Civil Rights Commission report cites the testimony of a Mayrland realtor to show how the real estate business encourages white exclusivity:

> . . . it is not really the homeowner who is making that decision to keep that neighborhood all-white for his friends and neighbors, so much [as] the real estate broker who is in business and who still considers it economic suicide to make a sale to blacks in that all-white neighborhood (13, p. 16).

Thus many U. S. brokers support the existence of a dual housing market -- one for whites and a second for blacks and other minorities. Real estate sales personnel steer whites to houses in white neighborhoods. They steer minorities to homes in minority or "transition" neighborhoods by not letting them know about available homes in all-white areas (13, pp. 17-18).

This practice contributes toward the black-white division which means that 20 years after Brown, social and economic obstacles to school desegregation remain the same or even a little worse than in 1954. With the Supreme Court's overturn of the Roth decision we must work ever so much harder to overcome these obstacles.

Obstinate School Boards

School boards in many Northern cities are determined to maintain the segregated status quo, thus creating another barrier to school desegregation. Many of these obstinate school boards were elected precisely

because of their anti-busing or anti-desegregation positions, and community support, therefore, reinforces their stubbornness.

There is strong precedent for this situation. Between 1940 and 1960, the black population of the South increased by 1.5 million, while the black population of the North increased by 4.6 million (12, p. 13). Northern school boards failed to place the black migrants in the schools which white children attended, routing them, instead, into schools where black northerners have been contained historically. Such actions helped set the segregation pattern in the North, a pattern which combined with segregated housing, insured a well-intentioned denial of quality educational facilities to many generations of blacks.

The "defacto" segregation which has resulted from discrimination in the larger society is every bit as intentional as the "dejure" segregation in the South. And it is probably more harmful since it is easier for officials to ignore.

In making his 1971 pro-busing decision, Roth took a giant step toward eliminating the distinctions between Southern defacto and Northern dejure segregation:

> The principle [sic] causes (of segregation) undeniably have been population movement and housing patterns, but state and local governmental actions, including school board actions, have played a substantial role in promoting segregation. It is, the Court believes, unfortunate that we cannot deal with public school segregation on a no-fault basis, for if racial segregation in our public schools is an evil, then it should make no difference whether we classify it dejure or defacto. Our objective, logically, it

> seems to us, should be to remedy a condition which we believe needs correction . . . . We need not minimize the effect of actions of federal, state and local governmental offices and agencies, and the actions of loaning institutions and real estate firms in the establishment and maintenance of segregated residential patterns -- which lead to school segregation -- to observe that blacks, like other ethnic groups in the past, have tended to separate from the larger group and associate together. The ghetto is at once both a place of confinement and refuge. There is enough blame for everyone to share (1, p. 26).

Federal Foot-Dragging

Ever since Roth's dramatic and accurate expose of Northern guilt, little has been done to correct the inequalities in education. A 117 page report by the Center for National Policy Review said, "Northern schools today are far more segregated than those in the South" as a result of federal foot-dragging (3). Of 84 civil rights compliance reviews conducted in the North, the study found that 52 are still open and unresolved. The average age of the unresolved cases exceeds 37 months. "While a few staff investigations have been shaky," the report said, "HEW's files literally bulge with documented evidence of violations of law (3)."

Attitude and Race

We clearly must work to overcome the barriers to integrated education because integrated schools are the key to the development and perpetuation of racial attitudes necessary for the smooth functioning of a multi-racial society. Racial isolation is damaging not only because black children are

denied resources often available to white pupils (7), but also because it may lead to fear and suspicion of unfamiliar races and cultures.

A study by J. Kenneth Morland at Randolph Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, shows that segregated schools reinforce negative attitudes which black and white children have toward each other. Morland's study shows that by the end of high school in a segregated school system, black children have developed favorable attitudes about their own racial group, but highly unfavorable attitudes about whites. White children consistently, from elementary through high school, showed a favorable ranking of their own race and an unfavorable rating of blacks (10).

Tracking and Trapping

Educators must stay on the case of integrated schools; however, while all-black enclaves remain, we must work to provide the best possible education for the children in those areas. We must also see that children in newly desegregated schools are treated fairly. It is the educator's responsibility to make sure that problems within individual schools do not thwart the educational process.

Segregated schools and newly desegregated schools, for example, open the door to testing abuse and the misunderstanding of tests by school administrators. In one school in a midwestern city, children in the second grade were divided into 12 ability groups on the basis of their performances on a single reading test. A study showed that by the

end of twelfth grade, those who remained in school were still in those same ability groups. Children in the lower groups -- mostly low-income minorities -- had been tracked and trapped into educational situations where they received very little opportunity to advance academically.

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

Data shows that this type of discrimination frequently occurs when tests are allowed to predict success in education. According to Columnist Chuck Stone, former Director of Minority Affairs for ETS, standardized test scores and family income levels are positively correlated. That is, a child coming from a low-income family will probably score low on IQ or achievement tests. A child from a middle-income or upper-income family will score much higher. Since minority status often goes hand-in-hand with low income status, blacks, Chicanos and American Indians frequently are shut off from the better educational opportunities offered by individual schools.

Teacher Disdain

Studies by Robert Rosenthan, Lenore Jacobson, Michael Palardy and others (11) have shown that teachers teach more to children they like than to children they dislike. Eleanor Leacock (11, p. 63) carried this line of research a step further to show which children teachers liked and disliked.

Leacock studied four schools in four neighborhoods, two poor and two middle-income. She found that teachers felt much less favorable toward the lower-class children than toward the middle class. Forty percent of their comments about poor children were negative, compared to 20 percent

about middle-income children. Compounding this phenomenum, Leacock found that teachers talked more negatively about blacks than whites, 43 percent to 17 percent.

Recommendations

So we find that twenty years after Brown equal educational opportunity and quality education are not realities. Rather, they are hindered by discrimination in society at large and discrimination within individual schools and even individual classrooms.

Educators today must make a commitment to work against these forces of discrimination. We must watch for flagrant violations of housing covenants, the illegal practices of realtors, and we must monitor the officials responsible for correcting these social and economic injustices. We must look over the shoulders of our school boards to insure that they do not ignore their legal and moral obligations. And we must look to teacher training practices to see that future teachers acquire an understanding of minority cultures and minority problems (8, p. 27).

Colleges of education must begin to develop teacher training programs to prevent white middle-income or upper-income teachers from responding to poor or minority youngsters in racially motivated ways. Not only do the teacher's racial prejudices or misconceptions damage the self-perception of the minority child, they also may reinforce the prejudices of the white child, helping to perpetuate the pathology of racism.

The NAACP has taken legal action against public school boards for contributing to unequal education; perhaps, next, the NAACP Legal Defense will have to take action against Colleges of Education for failing to provide teachers with the expertise to work effectively in multi-racial, multi-ethnic classrooms.

Educators must constantly keep watch over practices and institutions in American society which could be detrimental to the cause of quality education. And not only must we be "watchdogs," we also must be spokesmen calling attention to the injustices and the discrimination we see. Only by giving constant attention to the needs of our children and the shortcomings of our education system can we hope to eliminate the inequalities in the system and achieve quality education for all.

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